

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2003

# AMANNEE



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**COVER PHOTO:** U.S. Secretary of Labor Elaine L. Chao visited Ghana December 20, 2003 to highlight the United States' continuing commitments to end the worst forms of child labor and how programs in the workplace can help stop spread of HIV/AIDS. Secretary Chao (extreme left), with the U.S. Ambassador Mary C. Yates admires some batik designs of an exhibition mounted by two people living with HIV/AIDS. At the extreme right is Honorable Yaw Barima, Minister of manpower Development and Employment.

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## EDUCATION USA:

# EDUCATIONAL ADVISING SERVICES THROUGH THE U.S. EMBASSY

**Nancy Keteku,**  
Regional Educational Advising  
Coordinator for Africa.

The EducationUSA Advising Centers in Accra and Kumasi provide guidance and resources to Ghanaians pursuing U.S. study. But Ghanaians' quest for higher education abroad dates back several centuries, to scholars who ventured to the renowned university at Timbuktu, and to Philip Quarcoo, who is believed to have obtained his doctorate in the Netherlands in the mid-1700s. Ghanaians began traveling to the United States for university education in the early 1900s: as we all know, Kwegyir Aggrey attended North Carolina Central University in the 1920s, while Kwame Nkrumah attended Lincoln University and the University of Pennsylvania in the 1930's. These pioneers led Ghanaians to recognize that U.S. higher education has much to offer to nation-builders. In the 1950s, Cocoa Board provided U.S. scholarships, and in the 1960s and 1970s, the AASPAU and AFRAD programs, funded by the U.S. government, opened the door wider. By the 1980s, however, these government-financed programs had given way to private financing, leaving Ghanaians to find their own way to international higher education. That the number of Ghanaians studying in the States has continued to grow by leaps and bounds is testimony to the high value placed on education, and the resourcefulness and determination of Ghanaians.

Last year, 3,032 Ghanaian students and over 160 scholars were officially enrolled in full-time, regionally-accredited institutions in the United States. Ghana places third in Africa in the number of students enrolled in US institutions of higher education, behind only Kenya and Nigeria. The number of Ghanaian students has increased by an average of 17% annually for past decade, compared to 10% annual increases for Africa and only 3% for the rest of the world. Two-thirds of the Ghanaian students in the US are undergraduates, while 30% are graduate students. The most popular fields of study at all levels are social sciences, engineering, business, and computer science, but Ghanaians appear to be interested in almost every academic field. Male students



are more likely than their female counterparts to venture abroad for their studies; the under-representation of Ghanaian women, especially in U.S. graduate schools, gives female applicants an advantage in the admissions process.

Ghanaian students are enrolled in over 600 colleges and universities in every state except for Alaska, South Dakota, and Wyoming. The most popular destinations are Ohio, New York, and Pennsylvania, with Iowa, Massachusetts, and Minnesota following closely behind.

Ghanaian students' success at obtaining scholarships and financial aid is legendary, setting records that are the envy of the developing world, and taking home the Scholarships World Cup, year after year. No country comes anywhere near Ghana's record. In 2003, for example, American colleges and universities awarded almost \$7 million in scholarships and financial aid to Ghanaian students, an amount that is renewable for each of study. This funding comes not from government or foundation sources, but from university funds.

The EducationUSA Advising Centers, located at the Public Affairs Section of the U.S. Embassy in Accra and at CEDEP in Kumasi, serve some two thousand persons each month. Both centers are staffed by trained professional advisors, all of whom are graduates of U.S. universities. Educational advising programs include: a weekly introductory group session that is the undergraduate applicant's first step in the admission process; individual advising three mornings a week; the most extensive

reference libraries in Africa; advising by phone and e-mail; test prep; special sessions on topics such as pre-departure orientation and admissions strategies; and outreach to local educational institutions.

For prospective undergraduates, the road to U.S. college or university starts with the introductory group session, which is offered free of charge in Accra every Monday at 1:00 p.m., and in Kumasi every Thursday morning at 10:00. This two-hour program includes a video, *Exploring New Worlds*, and a detailed presentation covering the steps involved, from selecting the most suitable colleges, to arranging finances, to writing an effective admissions essay and taking standardized tests such as the SAT and the TOEFL. All undergraduate applicants are required to attend the introductory group session and do research in the advising library to plan their education, before seeing the advisor individually.

Individual advising is offered in Accra on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday mornings from 8:00 to 12:00, and in Kumasi on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. The educational advising reference library, Internet research facility, and test-prep computers are also open for student research at the same hours. Students pay a modest entry fee of C10,000 for advising services, or they can enroll in our membership scheme whereby they can participate in a complete package of advising programs for a one-time fee of C200,000. Membership cards can be used at both centers, for the convenience of students traveling back and forth between Accra and Kumasi.

Beyond the walls of the Public Affairs Section, the advising program serves as liaison with Ghanaian and American higher education officials and maintains an extensive network of contacts in both countries. The advisors welcome invitations from Ghanaian secondary schools and universities to speak to students about U.S. higher education; an example of this is a forum sponsored by the National Society of Black Engineers at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science & Technology every year, for final-year students interested in U.S. graduate study.

The EducationUSA Advising Centers also host visiting officials from U.S. universities, facilitating opportunities for





**EDUCATIONAL ADVISING LIBRARY:** *Students prepare (learning), for their SAT and TOEFL exams at the Educational Advising Library.*

them to visit Ghanaian educational institutions and meet with prospective students. We host visiting American student groups, setting up forums for interaction with their Ghanaian counterparts. During the months of October and November this year, the EducationUSA Advising Center hosted admissions officers from a dozen U.S. universities eager to meet Ghanaian students and their parents. Anyone visiting the EducationUSA Advising Center will find notices announcing opportunities to meet U.S. students and university administrators, especially during holiday periods in December and June-July.

When students come to the EducationUSA Advising Center, their questions most frequently center on financial aid, standardized tests, and student visas, all of which are important components of a successful admissions strategy.

Families are expected to bear as much as they can of their son's or daughter's educational costs. Despite Ghana's outstanding record in winning scholarships, the vast majority of Ghanaian families are paying their own way, and the average cost is about \$20,000 per year. Families must start planning for higher education finance when their children are young, because only the most outstanding students, students who have devoted months to planning successful admissions strategies, can hope for full scholarships at either the undergraduate or graduate level. Most scholarships or financial aid are partial awards that cover only a fraction of the total cost, so parents must be prepared to contribute as much as they can. The more financial aid a student needs, the more competitive the admissions process.

Most, but not all, U.S.-bound students

will apply to colleges or universities that require standardized tests as part of the admissions process. However, taking tests is not the first step toward a U.S. education; planning the finances and selecting institutions comes before testing. After the student has selected at least ten universities that meet his or her criteria, the educational advisor is prepared to discuss

testing requirements. Our advisors will not give test registration bulletins to students until they have presented a viable educational plan.

No discussion of U.S. university admissions would be complete without mention of student visas. Let's put it this way: if all the Ghanaians who went to study in the States over the last thirty years had returned home, and if all the current visa applicants designed and carried out their own educational plans, and if they were all financed by scholarships or funding from their own biological parents, we wouldn't have a visa problem. Good planning leads to successful visa applications. Students who use the Educational Advising Center, especially those who join our membership scheme, plan their education thoroughly and earn a high student visa issuance rate. Last year, the Consular Section of the U.S. Embassy issued more than 1,100 F-1 student visas, an increase of 33% over the previous year.

International education is a two-way street, and U.S. students are very much interested in studying in Ghana. Ghana, one of Africa's most popular study abroad destinations, hosts over U.S. study abroad students each year for studies of one

## **INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ARE WELCOME TO STUDY IN THE U.S.**

**By Maura Harty**

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs

**I**nternational students have always been — and still are — welcome to study in the United States. The 9/11 tragedy emphasizes the importance of national security, but that should not discourage legitimate students from coming here. We value the diversity and richness they bring to American campuses.

The impact of visa law and procedures on students is always carefully considered. Students must show they intend to return to their home country after finishing their course of study and how they will pay for their education.

Although visa interviews are brief, they are important. Students are given consideration in scheduling interviews, so they will be on time for the school year. Many embassies and consulates have opened special windows for students and exchange visitors. Some

are interviewing students even without appointments.

Fewer than 2 percent of all visa applicants must wait for an interagency security review. More than 90 percent of those reviews are completed in less than three weeks. Students in certain scientific fields might wait longer, so applicants and their U.S. hosts must plan accordingly. Visa policies are designed to maximize security of the United States while encouraging legitimate visitors, including students, to come to this country. The goal of secure borders/open door is nowhere more meaningful than in our desire to attract the best students worldwide to the United States. We hope they and their home countries will continue benefiting from the outstanding education America's universities offer the world.

*This column by Maura Harty, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs, was published in Newsday September 12 and is in the public domain. No republication restrictions.*

semester or longer, plus hundreds for shorter periods. These students are enrolled at Ghanaian universities and in non-campus based programs. PAS works closely with their program directors and campus administrators to make these programs successful.

Readers of Amanee are cordially invited to explore the resources of the EducationUSA Advising Centers in Accra and Kumasi. Research shows that students (and their parents) who use our educational advising services are more likely to make appropriate selections of universities, more likely to complete the application process successfully, more likely to plan viable financial strategies, more likely to gain admission, more likely to qualify for student visas, more likely to complete university and earn their degrees, and more likely to return home and succeed in their chosen careers.\*\*\*



*Ghanaian students spend time searching for schools in the U.S. College Hand Books.*

## U.S. TEACHERS WANT TO “GIVE SOMETHING BACK” IN AFRICA

*Sullivan Foundation sending 48 American teachers to Africa this year*

**By Susan Ellis**  
Washington File Staff Writer

**A**buja, Nigeria — President Bush announced July 12 at the Leon H. Sullivan Summit being held in Abuja that the U.S. Agency for International Development is providing a new \$5 million grant to the Sullivan Foundation to support its program to send Americans to teach in African schools and universities. Mac A. Stewart, vice provost for academic affairs at Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, and an official in the Sullivan program, discussed the program with the Washington File.

The Sullivan Foundation program is called the International Foundation for Education and Self Help (IFESH). Stewart chairs the committee that sends teachers to Africa. He said 48 American teachers will be sent this year. They have been selected for their competence from about 800 applications and more than 1,000 enquiries. The African countries “tell us what they want and we attempt to match that,” he said, adding that occasionally it is a little difficult as when Benin asked for a Ph.D in mathematics. “We get more applicants from the humanities — social and behavioral sciences, but we get the full gamut — all the way from pre-school up through the university level,” he said. In the program all the Americans teach African teachers.



*President Bush addresses the Leon H. Sullivan Summit, on annual meeting promoting U.S. and African relations, in Abuja, Nigeria, Saturday, July 12, 2003.*

The new grant announced by Bush, said Stewart, who has worked with the program for ten years, will provide “a continuation of the program for another two years.”

Who are the Americans interested in giving up a year or more of their lives, with little pay, to teach in Africa? Stewart said

“Very often the motivation of teachers who are going is their desire to help others. We attempt to arrange to meet the goal of IFESH, which is self help and self sufficiency. So we teach the teachers rather than just having a class and leaving.”

Teachers receive “a small stipend, similar to that Peace Corps Volunteers receive,” he said, “so it’s essentially a volunteer activity. The country they’re going to finds them housing.” The main motivation, regardless of ethnic background of the teachers, is “interest in doing good and in Africa,” Stewart said.

Asked whether they must find new jobs on their return to the United States, Stewart said universities often grant leave to such teachers, and this year “the Columbus (Ohio) public schools granted leave for persons participating in the program. This is the only such case I’ve heard of from public schools,” he said, “but its going in that direction.”

“Many of the persons who go are recently retired,” he said. “In their applications many say this is something they’re wanted to do, for a combination of two reasons: they have desired to visit Africa but they also desire to give back to others. Now they have that opportunity.”\*\*\*



*Federal Capitol Territory head Aliyu Babangida, left, presents the key to the city to President Bush in Abuja, Nigeria, Saturday, July 12, 2003.*



# Opportunities and Challenges in Civil Society Participation in Law Making: The Case of the National Health Insurance Bill

By Mahama Ayariga and Ted Lawrence

The National Health Insurance (NHI) bill generated more public interest and engagement than any piece of legislation put before Parliament in the past year. The experience of this bill demonstrates the degree to which it has become commonplace for members of Parliament (MPs) to seek civil society input, and for civil society organizations (CSOs) to insist on their right to be heard during the legislative process. Since 1997, USAID/Ghana's Democracy and Governance program has focused on increasing the level of civic input into policy making at both the local and national level, and the case of NHI bill case shows the gains that have been made while also indicating areas where more work needs to be done. In the case of NHI bill, three USAID partners, Legal Resources Centre (LRC), Partners for Health Reform Plus (PHR<sub>plus</sub>), and Cooperative League of the USA (CLUSA), worked closely together to facilitate civil society input into the bill. The result was the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Health and Finance receiving a record number of memoranda on this bill and the committee deciding that nationwide public hearings were required.

## Background

Ghana's current "cash and carry" system of health care financing prevents many Ghanaians from accessing good health care as the system requires that patients pay for services rendered at the point of delivery. In this system, Ghanaians without resources to pay their medical bills are often denied access to medical services. Beginning in the 1990s, a number of pilot health insurance schemes, referred to as Mutual Health Organization (MHOs), have been developed to address this problem. Recognizing that the financing of health care was a major political issue, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) made the provision of nationwide health insurance part of their platform for the 2000 elections.

NHI bill was laid before Parliament on July 11, 2003. The majority initially set an agenda for the bill that would lead to the bill's passage on July 25, the last day of

the second sitting of Parliament for the year.<sup>2</sup> The bill was referred to the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Finance and Health for review, with the expectation that they would present their report to Parliament by July 20, to allow full consideration and passage by the 25<sup>th</sup>. This time schedule caught many in civil society by surprise as they had expected that Parliament would accord more time for consideration as this was a bill around which there was significant public interest. The bill was in its third draft. While various national level interest groups had had an opportunity to provide comments to the Ministry of

in enriching the level of debate by ensuring that there is a multiplicity of views put forward in a well articulated manner. In particular, the LRC tries to assist citizens and citizen groups who have difficulty accessing Parliament and as result, whose views tend to go underrepresented. To achieve this, the project identifies channels through which citizens can intervene in the legislative process. Getting citizens and civil society groups involved in the legislative process helps to demystify the institution and increases citizen confidence for future engagement. Simultaneously, Parliamentarians enjoy the benefit of



*Parliamentary Committee Hearing of the National Health Insurance during a National House of Chiefs conference.*

Health (MOH) during the development of the bill, the version laid before Parliament was considered to be significantly different than the earlier drafts and raised new concerns.

## The LRC, PHR<sub>plus</sub>, and CLUSA

The LRC's parliamentary advocacy program's objective is to promote civic input into legislation. The LRC does not take a political position and does not take any side in a debate. It is interested simply

hearing the view points of weaker interest groups. This creates opportunity for institutional responsiveness to less articulated, though usually widely held grievances. Democratic responsiveness is a precondition for confidence in democratic institutions.

PHR<sub>plus</sub> works with local partners to make health care more affordable and accessible through technical assistance to community-based healthcare financing schemes. In Ghana, PHR<sub>plus</sub> provides technical assistance to local Mutual

Health Organizations (MHOs), assisting groups that are interested in setting up their own MHOs. *PHRplus* draws on its experiences in Senegal, Mali, Tanzania, and Zambia and helps these groups through the various stages of their development. The MHO movement started off small in Ghana with just a handful of organizations in the late 1990s. Today, there are over 200, and they are effectively meeting the health care needs of their members.

Cooperative League of the USA's (CLUSA) Government Accountability Improves Trust (GAIT) project works with civic unions to engage local government on issues of concern. Civic unions are chartered, registered umbrella organizations representing CSOs/CBOs, and the GAIT project fosters their development and strengthens their capacity to engage local government. The project promotes constant interaction between district assemblies and civil society organizations by organizing events like district Town Meetings where public officials can be queried by local citizens.

### **Civil Society and the Struggle for a Voice**

The LRC and *PHRplus* organized a joint workshop to allow stakeholders to brief each other on their various concerns and develop a strategy to ensure that the final bill was more to their liking. The participants included a cross section of civil society including existing operators of private for profit and non-profit/mutual health insurance schemes, and representatives of the Trades Union Congress (TUC), Civil Servants Association (CSA), Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT), Ghana Registered Nurses Association (GRNA) and Judicial Service Association of Ghana (JUSAG). Interest was so great that several people who heard the radio announcements for the workshop simply showed up.

As a result of the workshop, the stakeholders developed a two-pronged strategy. First, they wanted to ensure that more time was given for consideration of the bill. Second, they put together a coalition to advance their concerns about the bill. Immediately following the workshop, the stakeholders wrote up their concerns in memoranda that were presented to the Joint Committee and made efforts to engage the press hoping to generate a wider public debate. As a result, the NHI bill entered into the national debate, and the stakeholders' call for an extended period for consultations on the bill resonated with the public at large.

The Joint Committee was quick to respond. First, they extended the number of committee sittings to enable more interest groups to appear before the committee. Then, they decided to hold nationwide public hearings. This was a significant step as it was only the second time that Parliament had conducted regional public hearings on a bill. The first case being National Reconciliation Commission bill hearing held in August 2002.

### **The Process and Participation**

At the request of the Joint Committee, the LRC helped facilitate the regional public hearings. This included encouraging civil society participation, providing supporting documentation on the legislation to those interested, and generating media interest in the hearings. The hearings were well attended with people coming from a range of backgrounds. This included representatives of various MHOs, organized labor, and other parts of civil society including the CLUSA sponsored civic unions.

Prior to the public hearings, CLUSA's GAIT project facilitated discussions among these civic unions. The civic unions held seminars to discuss the bill and its potential impact, and to decide how they would respond. As a result, most of the civic unions submitted memoranda to the Joint Committee, and those civic unions that could, sent representatives to the regional public hearing closest to them to make a presentation of their concerns.

During the hearings, individuals and representatives of interest groups were allotted time to make oral presentations to the joint committee. Generally, the Joint Committee simply listened to the witnesses as they made their presentations; the MPs did not ask questions. Instead, much time was given to representatives of the Ministries of Finance and Health to explain the core proposals contained in the bill and to argue why the public should support them. Often times, after witnesses made their presentation, representatives of the two ministries were provided time to respond to the issues raised by the witnesses.

Prior to, during, and after the public hearings, there was an outpouring of memoranda presented to the Joint Committee. This bill generated the most memoranda of any bill considered in 2003 and could be the leader for all bills laid before Parliament since the fourth republic began in 1992. While many of the memoranda simply re-stated basic points raised in the various public hearings and

committee sittings, there were a number that carefully articulated stakeholder concerns and proposed amendments to the bill to address those concerns.

### **Issues in the Debate over the National Health Insurance Bill**

The oral presentations and the memoranda focused on three broad areas. These included the institutional framework for the implementation of the national health insurance scheme; the perceived threat to existing mutual health organizations presently being established by communities; and how the health insurance scheme would be financed.

Many members of the civil society were apprehensive about the prospect of creating another national bureaucracy to implement the health insurance programme. Largely influenced by their experiences with existing state bureaucracies, they were distrustful of the capacity of another such structure to implement the programme.

Meanwhile, the existing MHOs felt the creation of district health insurance schemes were a threat to their continued survival. For one, the bill called for new taxes to supplement the funds of the proposed district mutual schemes, while the existing MHOs would remain financed entirely by the premiums of their subscribers. MHOs believed this would undercut the incentive for individuals to join existing mutual health organizations. Second, the proposed new regulatory framework for existing MHOs seemed cumbersome, difficult to comply with, and laid down certain requirements that threatened to undermine the viability of existing MHOs. Meanwhile, private insurance companies were resentful of their exclusion from the health insurance industry if they operated any other insurance business.

Organized labor opposed the idea that a portion of their contributions to the social security fund would be used to finance the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF). The bill proposed to use two and one half per cent of the contributions towards the social security fund to finance the NHIF. For one, labor argued that Government needed to consult them first before such a provision was included. The social security fund was set up as their pension fund, and Government did not have the prerogative to divert portions of the fund for other uses. Second, the workers were concerned about the long term viability of the social security fund, arguing that pensions were already very low and that actuarial studies disclosed a threat to the

viability of the pension fund if the proposed deductions were made. Finally, labor was concerned about the proposed two and one half percent National Health Insurance levy, believing it was simply another increase to the value added tax (VAT) and that it would increase what was already high tax burden on the average Ghanaian.

Evaluation of Impact of Civil Society Participation-Challenges and Opportunities While not all of the stakeholder concerns were addressed when the bill was eventually passed in late August, this experience demonstrates a powerful example of civic organizing on short notice. Civil society's voice was heard, and the Government and Parliament strived to be as responsive as they could. As one observer commented, ten years ago Government would have had no problem pushing this bill through Parliament on short notice. Now, things have changed, and both Government and Parliament recognize the importance of consulting stakeholders and trying to ensure stakeholder support for Government policy.

When the revised bill went through the final reading, several changes had been made, but the core proposals remained the same. While a number of stakeholders were unhappy with the result, Parliament had displayed a willingness to engage interest groups and civil society in the discussion of the proposals contained in the bill. One must now look at the process of consultation to see whether this experience demonstrates potential openings that if addressed, could enhance the level of consultation and potentially lead to legislation that better reflects stakeholder concerns.

For one, the public hearings in the regions appeared to take the form of public sensitization programmes with very prominent roles being accorded to the ministers accompanying the Joint Committee. More time was spent extolling the virtues of the proposed legislation than time given to listen and probe the testimony being presented by the public. This process limited the ability of the Joint Committee to draw out alternative ideas from the witnesses. This was not deliberate; rather, it demonstrates a lack of experience with such processes. The regional public hearings held to consider the National Reconciliation Commission Bill were handled much in the same manner. This experience simply demonstrates that being a new parliamentary democracy, Ghana's Parliament needs to develop further skills in some aspects of deliberative democracy, particularly in relation to engaging the public in open debate. Perhaps, exposing parliamentarians to more active committee hearings in other

countries, particularly ones in Africa, that have more experience in processes of public consultation would be one way of enhancing and improving the tradition in Ghana.

Second, the role of the civic unions under CLUSA's GAIT project illustrates a powerful example for grassroots civic society participation in the parliamentary process. The civic unions were able in a short timeframe to mobilize, sensitize, and encourage their members to participate in the public hearings and develop joint memoranda to be submitted to Parliament. In addition, several of the memoranda were sent by e-mail, channeling them in through either the CLUSA or USAID office. This use of e-mail to send in memoranda establishes the case for the development of the e-parliament system in Ghana. Essentially, the e-parliament concept applies information technology to the process of parliamentary democracy to facilitate greater citizen interaction with Parliament. With the presence of Internet access in most parts of the country and citizens' organizations in the various regions of Ghana already making use of the Internet, there is a strong case for developing the institutional framework for the e-parliament concept.

Third, though there were several avenues for influencing the members of the Joint Committees as they went to the various regions, the methods used by members of civil society and interest groups were limited. There is an obvious need to explore alternative strategies for influencing outcomes of parliamentary deliberations and exposing interest groups to them. Some of these include simple things like how to write effective memoranda and present

positions at committee hearings. The institution of parliamentary lobbying needs to be developed.

Fourth, while the two year old Parliamentary Research Centre is able to handle the basic research requests of Parliament, it does not have resources or the skill base to provide in depth analysis of legislation like the NHI bill. The MPs could have benefited from detailed fiscal analysis that could demonstrate the fiscal impact of the bill so that they could independently assess the allegations that the bureaucracy created by the bill could potentially threaten the viability of the NHI fund. In addition, similar analysis could help MPs determine whether the viability of the social security fund was truly in danger and what the potential costs to Government would be if the fund were to fail.

Finally, this case offers a compelling example of development partners working together on a shared objective. The LRC, PHR<sub>plus</sub>, and CLUSA teamed up, each focusing on their area of expertise, to ensure that the discussion on the NHI bill reached a wider audience and that this wider audience was provided critical information on the issue so that they could provide informed input. The result was that the level of debate was enhanced, and a broad spectrum of civil society extending to the district level and beyond was engaged in that debate.

1. Mahama Ayariga is the Executive Director of the Legal Resources Centre (LRC) and Ted Lawrence is USAID/Ghana's Legislative Specialist.

2. The Parliament of Ghana has three sittings in a year. In 2003, the first ran from January 21 – March 28, 2003, the second from May 6 – July 25, and the third from October 14- December 19. \*\*\*



*A section of the participants during interacts with questions and suggestions.*



## TOWN MEETING:

# PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

By Papa Sene

On July 30 residents of Navrongo and surrounding communities were curious to know what was happening as workers from the District Assembly (DA) arrived very early to set up canopies and arrange chairs and benches around the old tennis court in the center of town not far from the market place. They were wondering what was going on. In my opinion they had not been paying attention to the event that was scheduled to take place, because the day before as I came to town, I saw a large banner on the main road, which read “Town Meeting.” However, when I arrived at the guesthouse, I was pleasantly surprised that we were recognized as members of the Government Accountability Improves Trust (GAIT) team.

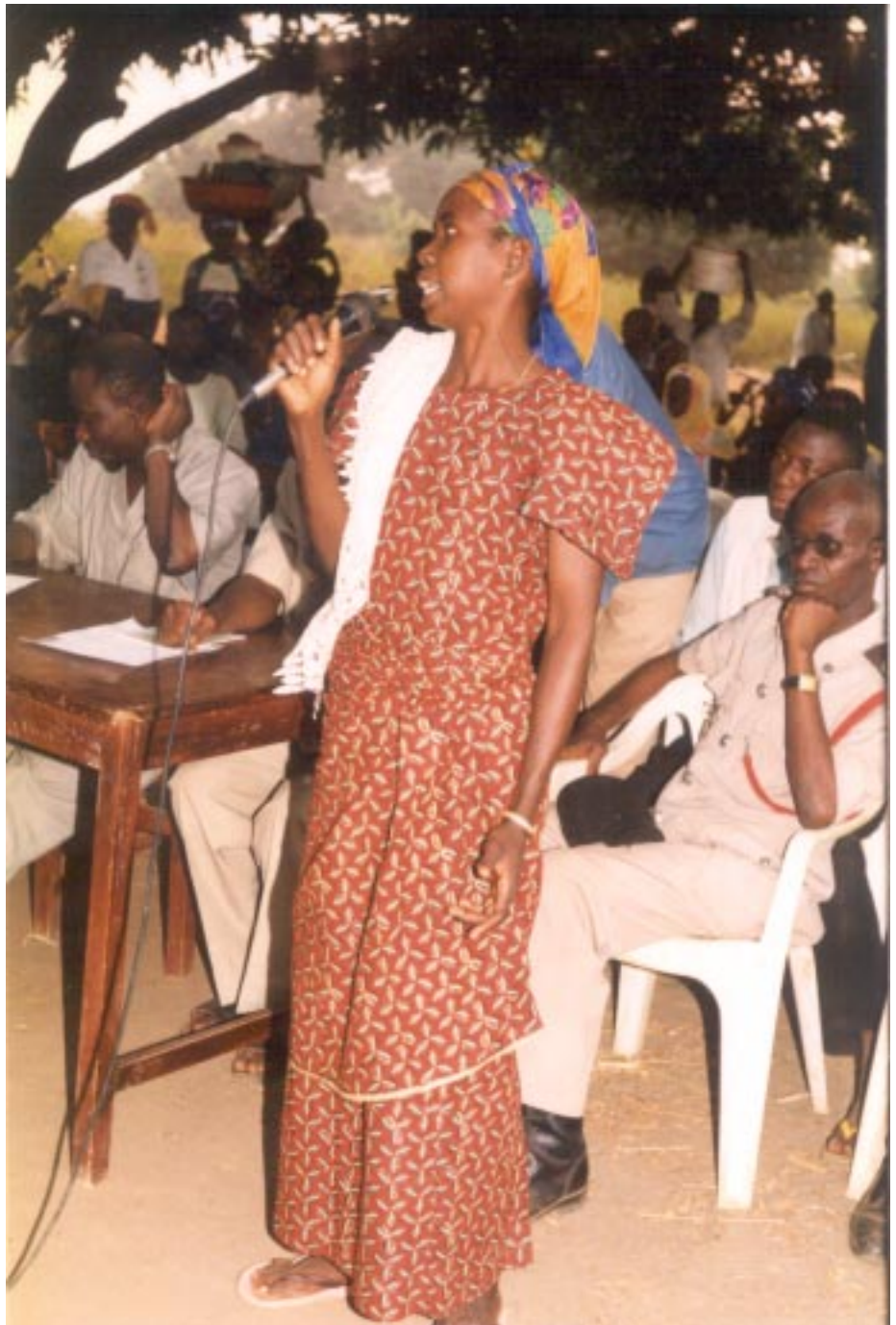
The Father-Director greeted us with a hug smile, and said, “Ah! You must be with the organizers of the Town Meeting. I’ll be there!”

I couldn’t help feeling a sense of satisfaction about the work the team had done. The publicity was well-done, and the team’s labor had borne fruit. I later learned that the radio waves from the local station had carried messages over the past three days in local languages as well as English to inform the people of the meeting. In town I could sense that everyone from the DA to the market place was waiting with curiosity and excitement for this Town Meeting.

### But what is a Town Meeting?

Historians have shown that the town meetings, as we know them today, are similar to those during the time of Pericles in ancient Greece (500 B.C.) During these gatherings, laws were debated and made by adult males. I have a strong conviction that in pre-colonial Africa, similar forms of governmental decision-making existed. Of course, these notions of shared decision-making were adapted to the contours, complexities and richness of African cultures. Many proverbs and sayings from the Mandinka, Akan and Fulani, such as “words that come from only one mouth are not good” would lead one to believe that some form of collective decision-making existed in the management of villages and towns in ancient Africa.

Many contemporary political theorists argue that town meetings represent the purest form of democracy. At these



*A woman contributing to an issue at a Town Meeting at Bulenga in the Wa Municipality.*

meetings, all decisions are made by the citizens, thereby insuring that policy reflects public interest and needs. If well organized, town meetings can maximize citizen participation, bring ordinary voters and administrators together, give participants a sense of involvement in government affairs, and promote citizen education and community building.

### Town Meeting: A First in Kansena-Nankena

I overheard one of the leaders of the Kansena-Nankena Civic Union (CU), which is an apex body federating civil-society organizations in the district. The leader of the CU was apparently well informed, because he was explaining to a female

attendee from Paga that a town meeting wasn't a rally or a forum where public officials debate. I realized he was right to emphasize this point because frequently political or administrative officials say they are organizing town meetings, when in fact they are referring to campaign rallies and some other political meeting.

In Kansena-Nankena, the DA and Civic Union, supported by GAIT, seized the opportunity of the appointment of a new District Chief Executive (DCE) to initiate their first town meeting. With the help of the GAIT facilitator, the DA explained the purpose of the town meeting and handed out agendas and guidelines on the day of the meeting.

This Town Meeting was the first of its kind and was attended by more than 500 people from Civil Society Organizations members, Civic Union Leaders and DA officials. A wide range of issues pertaining to the development of the district and improvement of basic services was discussed. These included health, education, agriculture, development projects, revenue mobilization, law and order and good governance. People complained about the low level of education especially among females. Proposals were made on how to ensure that the enrollment rate of the girl-child is improved. Contributors expressed dissatisfaction about the low level of internally generated revenue especially in Navrongo Central. Equally important was the attendance of Civic Union leaders from Yendi, who were the guests of honor. They



*The Wa Municipal Chief Executive responding to an issue at the Bulenga Town Meeting organized late 2002.*

were there to observe the proceedings and gain valuable lessons that will be applied in their own district.

The process led by the moderator helped ordinary citizens as well as the Civic Union leaders to use this platform as an opportunity to articulate their views and to discuss how the relationship with DA officials could be strengthened. I was impressed by the way DA officials and assembly persons were attentively listening and taking notes. I could see the DCE from time to time asking some district

administration officers to take good note or to provide him with information on the issue at stake. There was a sense of satisfaction among the citizens and the officials. The DCE ended the meeting by stating that "with this town meeting, the culture of silence has been broken in this district."

### **CLUSA's Approach to Citizen Participation**

The town meeting is one of the Citizen Participation Techniques (CPTs) that the Cooperative League of the USA (CLUSA) has been using to promote citizen participation in local government. It allows any ordinary citizen (no matter the education level) to walk to the central microphone, state his/her name, identify his/her community, raise an issue of concern, and make a proposal on how to deal the problem that affects the community.

The end of the Town Meeting is also the starting point of a new process. In a follow-up meeting, the Civic Union organizes the issues raised in the town meeting by category and then drafts an advocacy plan. After this follow-up meeting, Civic Union will organize meetings with specific stakeholders, share information with DA administration and decentralized departments, and undertake appropriate advocacy actions.

Other CPTs that have been successfully introduced in Ghana by CLUSA in the implementation of the GAIT program includes Public Hearings, Questions and Answers meetings, Public Seminars and Information Sharing Exercises. For the first time in Ghana, Public Budget Hearings have

## **The Kasena Nankana Town Meeting**

**Jointly Organized by Civic Union, District Assembly, GAIT Program**

### **I. Setup**

- ❑ **Date:** Monday 30<sup>th</sup> July
- ❑ **Time:** 14:00 PM
- ❑ **Venue** – Navrongo Tennis court
- ❑ **No Official Delivering of Speeches**

### **II. Focus Questions to the Public**

- (i) What are the main issues that affect development in our district?
- (ii) What are the ideas/solutions to tackle these issues?
- (iii) How can Civil Society and local government officials collaborate to provide better services to the citizens of the Kasena Nankana District?

### **III. Process/Agenda**

- ❑ Welcome and Brief Opening Remarks
- ❑ Town Meeting goals, expectations, and rules by Moderator
- ❑ Introduction of participating CSOs elected officials, professional staff's special guest.
- ❑ Recognition of other elected officials in attendance - as group, not necessarily individually.
- ❑ Brief presentation of objective questions and issue at hand, 5-10 minutes
- ❑ Citizen Comments, 1-5 minutes per speaker
- ❑ Closing Remarks by Presiding Official
- ❑ Thank you for coming, participating Information about follow-up



provided the opportunity for the citizenry at the local level to access district budgets. GAIT's approach is to provide the actual budgets at least one week before the hearing. Extensive collaboration with the District Coordinating Director (DCD) and District Finance Officers is required to assemble budget information in a successful and effective manner. After the information has been distributed, there is a public presentation and discussion on the items listed in the budget. Citizens are afforded the opportunity to make suggestions and recommendations about the actual budget and how monies should be sent.

During the last 2002 District Assembly sitting in WA, Honorable Sahanunu Mogtari, the Upper West Regional Minister, addressed the DA. He stated the following:

"Let me commend your assembly for its recent initiative in organizing a public forum in conjunction with the Government Accountability Improves Trust (GAIT) Program to explain your budget. Even though I was not present at the forum, the indications are that the novelty was worth it. For me, such fora are necessary because they instill a sense of belonging in the people [to the DA]. Such meetings also affirm our commitment to transparency and grassroots participation in decision-making. I believe the assembly has taken note of all the sentiments that were expressed in good faith to guide them in their future

## The Kasena-Nankana Town Meeting: Concept and Guidelines

1. Our Town Meeting (TM) should be a beneficial encounter between Citizens and the District Officials, a collaborative get-together to share ideas, to make proposals, suggestion and contribution for the way forward.
2. This Town Meeting is more for Public Officials to listen to what the people have to say on current issues, their sentiments, feelings, their aspirations, their hopes and their dreams are, and to engage a two way dialogue
3. One of the prime reasons of this Town Meeting is to give people a chance to see their Public Officials and to actually get to ask them a question or two.
4. It's not mandatory for Public Officials to answer all questions on the spot. This temptation should be resisted. Another danger is to defend a position. This too fails to make the best use the Town Meeting technique.
5. The stress in this Kasena-Nankana Town Meeting should be for Officials to actively listen to the Public.
6. This Town Meeting is strictly not meant for (a) Personal attacks to officials (b) Any embarrassing questions.
7. Let all make this TM a Constructive Exercise.

deliberations and decision making"

The CPT, introduced by the GAIT program in Ghana, is a sensible and flexible way of promoting dialogue and a sense of shared responsibility between DAs, citizens, and CSOs. More importantly, CLUSA's approach to democracy and governance provide management tools on

an as needed basis, develop advocacy skills, and build confidence. As a result of the techniques, a culture of participation in local government is fostered. By enhancing this participation process, DA officials, assemblypersons, and citizens are empowered to make positive impact in their communities.\*\*\*

## USAID SUPPORT TO THE GAIT PROJECT

USAID has been working in 20 districts (two in each region) to build the capacity of local civil society organizations and promote effective relationships between these organizations and local District Assembly officials. The program will now continue in 10 districts (one per region), taking the program to the next phase, which will emphasize accountability and transparency on the local District Assembly level. Local groups will be encouraged to ensure that the District Assembly comply with the various oversight mechanisms that exist on paper but are often overlooked. The program will also work directly with District Assembly officials, offering training opportunities.

This project known as the Government Accountability Improves Trust (GAIT) is being implemented by the Cooperative League of the USA (CLUSA). CLUSA organizes district level civic union interaction

with national level partner workshops. These workshops provide



an opportunity for delegates from the ten civic unions to develop common goals and advocate for support from the Minister for Local Government and Rural Development. This project promotes constant interaction between district assemblies and civil society organizations. In order to achieve this goal, the project organized district Town Meetings where public officials can be queried by local citizens. As a result of Project GAIT's information sharing exercises, District Assembly officials are more open to discussing annual budgets with members of civil society. Officials are also willing to consider the legitimate concerns raised by civil society and factor in these issues in the decision-making process.\*\*\*



# Iftaar at Ambassador's Residence

*Ambassador Mary Carlin Yates on Tuesday, November 18, 2003 hosted an Iftaar dinner for a cross section of Ghanaian Muslims at her residence.*

*The Chief Imam, Sheikh Nuhu Sharubutu, representatives from the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission, muslims in the academia, politicians, business people and civil society were present to share the dinner with the Ambassador and other officials from the United States Embassy.*

*There were lively and fruitful discussions around the dinner tables, most of which centered on U. S. -Ghanaian Muslims relations.*

*The following are the Iftaar remarks by the the Ambassador Mary Carlin Yates.*

*Assa llaH mou Allah Koum,*

**O**n behalf of the American Embassy I want to welcome all of you to my house for Iftaar. We are here to celebrate the breaking of the Ramadan fast, a tradition that we would like to share with our friends and colleagues of the Islamic faith.

You are probably aware that adherence to Islam is growing in the United States. Americans have been attracted to its values of piety, morality and the importance of family and service to the community. Values, in fact, that Americans have long shared with Muslims.

President Bush noted the same at the Iftaar he hosted for Muslim Ambassadors and leaders at the White House on October 28. Let me quote briefly from his remarks that evening:

"For Muslims in America, and around the world, this holy time is set aside for prayer and fasting. It is a good time for people of all faiths to reflect on the values we hold in common -love of family, gratitude to God, and a commitment to religious freedom. America is a land of many faiths - and we honor and welcome and value the Muslim faith."

And on November 5, Sec of State Colin Powell hosted an Iftaar and told his guests the following:

"I have learned about Islam as a religion of peace and caring, a religion that teaches values we all share, such as tolerance, justice, and respect for human dignity. I have learned about Islam as an inspiration to millions of Americans and over a billion souls throughout the world. I have learned about how Islam's rich

civilization and traditions have shaped this country and brought benefits to all mankind. Most of all, I have learned about Islam as an enduring religion, providing hope and meaning to new generations.

"Our history has taught us the value of reaching across faiths, creeds, and cultures to achieve [our] dreams. Indeed, our ability to break bread together across faiths, as we are doing today, is a potent example of the diversity that is the heart of the strength as a people that we enjoy."

Just as in Washington, here in Accra we are observing Iftaar with you and we are honored and proud to be doing so. Recently in Nima and in Tema, our Deputy Chief of Mission accompanied others of my embassy colleagues to a distribution of food that we organized with our Muslim friends to demonstrate, in a modest way, our appreciation of the spirit of Ramadan and its meaning for the poor and less fortunate among us.

I hope we can participate with you in more events like this. We have much to learn from each other, and we can all aspire to the tolerance and the charity that Islam admonishes humankind to practice. I wish you a *Ramadan Kareem* and I thank you again for honoring us by coming this evening.\*\*\*



*Ambassador Yates (middle), with some of the invited guest at the Iftaar. On her right is the Chief Imam, Sheikh Nuhu Sharubutu; and on her left is the MP for Yendi, Hon. Alhassan Malik Yakubu, and Chief Kadir, Dagomba Community Chief in Accra.*

# BUSH SENDS EID AL-FITR GREETINGS TO MUSLIMS

*Says Islam promotes “justice, compassion, and personal responsibility”*

President Bush and First Lady Laura Bush sent their greetings to Muslims throughout the world celebrating Eid al-Fitr, the end of Ramadan.

In a November 24 statement issued by the White House Press Secretary, Bush described Islam as “a religion that inspires its followers to lead lives based on justice, compassion, and personal responsibility.” The president encouraged other Americans to reflect upon shared values and to celebrate the country’s diversity.

“By working together to advance peace and mutual understanding, we help build a future of promise and compassion for all,” he said.

Following is the text of Bush’s statement:



President Bush



First Lady Laura

I send greetings to Muslims celebrating Eid al-Fitr, the Festival of Breaking the Fast.

This festival marks the end of the month-long fast of Ramadan, the holiest period of the Islamic year. Eid al-Fitr is a time to give thanks to God for the blessings of renewed faith, to perform acts of charity, and to share traditional food and good wishes with family and friends. Islam is a

religion that inspires its followers to lead lives based on justice, compassion, and personal responsibility.

During this joyful season, I encourage people of all faiths to reflect on our shared values: love of family, gratitude to God, a commitment to religious freedom, and respect for the diversity that adds to our Nation’s strength. By working together to advance peace and mutual understanding,

we help build a future of promise and compassion for all.

Laura joins me in sending our best wishes for a joyous celebration. Eid mubarek.\*\*\*

GEORGE W. BUSH

## PEACE CORPS ENLISTS 1,000 NEW VOLUNTEERS TO FIGHT HIV/AIDS

*African and Caribbean nations will be targeted*

Washington — As part of historic legislation signed into law by President Bush May 27, the Peace Corps is mobilizing 1,000 new volunteers to fight HIV/AIDS in targeted African and Caribbean nations. The new recruits will join the more than 2,100 Peace Corps volunteers already engaged in HIV/AIDS projects around the world.

The new law, H.R. 1298, the U.S. Leadership Against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria Act of 2003, will direct \$15 billion (\$15,000 million) over the next five years to fight HIV/AIDS abroad, focusing on 12 African and two Caribbean countries where HIV/AIDS is heavily concentrated.

President Bush, in signing the bipartisan legislation into law at a May 27 ceremony at the Department of State, expressed his belief that fighting AIDS was a “moral duty,” and specifically recognized Peace Corps volunteers for their work abroad.

“Peace Corps volunteers are making an impact at the local level, and by committ-

ing an additional 1,000 volunteers, Peace Corps will be able to enhance a number of programs and expand HIV/AIDS projects in current Peace Corps countries,” Peace Corps Director Gaddi H. Vasquez stated in a press release announcing the initiative.

“The expansion includes additional volunteers working in targeted African countries, as well as those in the Caribbean. Also, more educational material, written in local languages, will be developed for volunteers to use in their communities,” he added.

Peace Corps currently has more than 2,100 volunteers worldwide working on HIV/AIDS activities. Peace Corps programs in two countries, Botswana and Swaziland, are devoted entirely to the pandemic. In addition, Peace Corps is exploring partnerships with other Federal agencies to further expand its efforts as part of the President’s initiative.

The Crisis Corps program, in which former Peace Corps volunteers return to

service for a limited period, will also commit volunteers to fight the disease, the Peace Corps press release noted, by lending their expertise to non-governmental organizations and government agencies worldwide for assignments of up to six months.

The Peace Corps will also enhance the ability of volunteers and their communities to obtain and exchange information about the latest innovations in public health education, behavior change, and delivery of services to people living with HIV/AIDS through the use of information technology.

Since 1961, more than 168,000 volunteers have served in the Peace Corps, working in such diverse fields as education, health and HIV/AIDS education and awareness, information technology, business development, the environment, and agriculture. Peace Corps Volunteers serve two-year tours of duty, must be U.S. citizens and at least 18 years of age.\*\*\*



# USAID Supports Food Security Activities in The North

By Henry Akorsu,  
USAID

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has stepped up its assistance in enhancing food security in the three northern regions of Ghana. As part of the assistance, the Government of the United States of America will extend a total of \$70 million through USAID to the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) for five years under the Food for Peace program.

The American people donate an average of \$18 million in food aid including wheat, wheat soy blend, bulgur wheat, soy fortified sorghum grits, and vegetable oil each year to Ghana. About 80% of the food aid is sold in Ghana. The proceeds are used to fund projects, primarily in the Northern, Upper East and Upper West regions to train farmers in modern methods of agriculture and provide micro-credits so they can purchase tools and other farm inputs. The resources are also used to dig wells to improve access to clean drinking water, improve child health, and increase enrolment and attendance in primary schools. The remaining 20% of the food items are distributed directly to vulnerable groups, including orphans, the elderly, and the physically and mentally challenged in society.

Under the new food security program, CRS will provide \$10 million in addition to USAID's \$70 million grant as its contribution towards food security goals in the three regions. The Government of Ghana is also making an important contribution to the program by exempting the food that is distributed directly to needy people from taxes and customs duties.

CRS has operated in Ghana since 1958 and has experienced many successes over the years. Over the next five years, CRS will utilize USAID's grant to expand its program from 36 to more than 200 communities in six districts in the three regions. This expansion will increase the number of mothers and children directly benefiting from this program from 5,000 to 40,000 by 2008.

The USAID program will continue to provide food supplements to pregnant and lactating mothers, which encourages their increased attendance at immunization clinics where they learn to adopt better nutrition and food preparation practices. These mothers also learn about practices to reduce the incidence of diarrhea in their children. An important impact of the program

is the adoption of exclusive breast feeding during a child's first six months. In many program communities, 99 percent of mothers are practicing exclusive breastfeeding, resulting in a reduction of stunting among children in these communities.

In the next five years, USAID will also assist the Ghana Health Service in the development of the Community-based Health Planning and Services (CHPS) initiative to increase community participation and access to health care, adding 12 new CHPS zones per year over the next five years.

The USAID program will expand its activities to include promotion of effective management of common childhood illnesses at the household and community levels. This will enhance the treatment of diarrhea, measles, malaria, malnutrition and acute respiratory infections, the five most common causes of mortality in young children.

In the education sector, USAID will continue to support its school-feeding program while incorporating a school health education and nutrition component and complementary quality education program to increase the impact of its overall education approach. The school health and nutrition program is a new initiative to increase a child's access to health education and reduce the incidence of intestinal parasites which threatens their ability to grow.

USAID's education support program over the past seven years provided food assistance to 1,096 primary schools and 342 pre-schools to help increase enrollment and attendance, particularly among girls in rural primary schools in the area. A total of 63,260 girls who achieved 85 percent school attendance rate have been provided a monthly take home ration. Indeed, as a result of the program, enrollment in schools in the three northern regions has increased by 43 percent.

The USAID program also provided 200 communities with classroom blocks, 2 communities with libraries, 21 schools with teacher's quarters, and 134 schools with classroom furniture. In addition, 1,610 executive committee members of Parent-



*A mother having her child weighed at a Food Assisted Child Survival Center.*



Teacher Associations have acquired skills that would contribute in enhancing community participation in the management of their primary schools.

In its general relief program, USAID will be in the front lines providing food to 5,500 persons living with HIV/AIDS, AIDS orphans, and other vulnerable children helping them to lead their lives with dignity. The program will also continue to sup-

port nearly 10,000 people with disabilities, elderly persons, and severely malnourished children. This assistance will help children and young adults to receive education as well as acquire vocational skills that will enable them to become active members in society.

Thanks to USAID's support, CRS is making important contributions to the Government of Ghana's poverty reduction strat-

egy in the three northern regions. With continued assistance from all public sector services, and more importantly, the collaboration of the district assemblies, USAID is hopeful that it will be able to achieve its objective of increasing rural incomes, improving health and sanitation, and ensuring that children receive a quality education in primary schools in the three northern regions.\*\*\*

# THANKSGIVING DAY

*Fourth Thursday in November*

**A**lmost every culture in the world has held celebrations of thanks for a plentiful harvest. The American Thanksgiving holiday began as a feast of thanksgiving in the early days of the American colonies almost four hundred years ago. In 1620, a boat filled with more than one hundred people sailed across the Atlantic Ocean to settle in the New World.

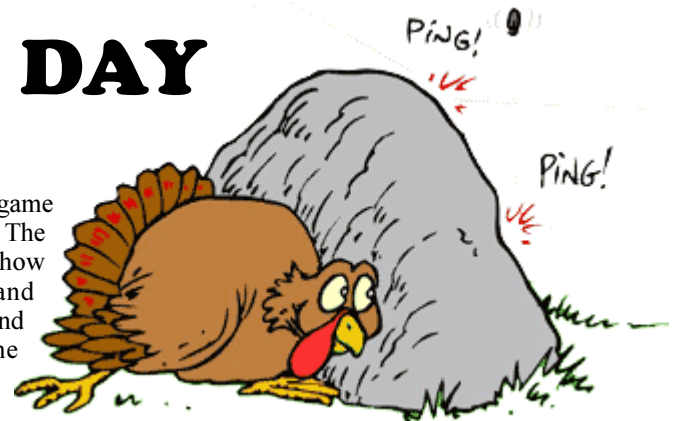
This religious group had begun to question the beliefs of the Church of England and they wanted to separate from it. The Pilgrims settled in the state of Massachusetts. Their first winter in the New World was difficult. They had arrived too late to grow many crops, and without fresh food, half the colony died from disease. The following spring the Iroquois Indians taught them how to grow corn (maize), a new food for the colonists. They showed them other crops to grow in the unfamiliar soil and how to hunt and fish. In the autumn of 1621, bountiful crops of corn, barley, beans and pumpkins were harvested.

The colonists had much to be thankful for, so a feast was planned. They invited the local Indian chief and 90 Indians. The Indians brought deer to roast with the

turkeys and other wild game offered by the colonists. The colonists had learned how to cook cranberries and different kinds of corn and squash dishes from the Indians. To this first Thanksgiving, the Indians had even brought popcorn. In following years, many of the original colonists celebrated the autumn harvest with a feast of thanks. After the United States became an independent country, Congress recommended one yearly day of Thanksgiving for the whole nation to celebrate. George Washington suggested the date November 26 as Thanksgiving Day. Then in 1863, at the end of a long and bloody civil war, Abraham Lincoln asked all Americans to set aside the last Thursday in November as a day of thanksgiving.

## Symbols of Thanksgiving

Turkey, corn (or maize), pumpkins and cranberry sauce are symbols, which represent the first Thanksgiving. Now all of these symbols are drawn on holiday decorations and greeting cards. The use of corn meant the survival of the colonies. "Indian corn" as a table or door decoration represents the harvest and the fall season. Sweet-sour cranberry sauce, or cranberry jelly, was on the first Thanksgiving table and is still served today. The cranberry is a small, sour berry. It grows in bogs, or muddy areas, in Massachusetts and other New England states. The Indians used the fruit to treat infections. They used the juice to dye their rugs and blankets. They taught the colonists how to cook the berries with sweetener and water to make a sauce. The Indians called it "ibimi" which means "bitter berry." When the colonists saw it, they named it "crane-berry" because the flowers of the berry bent the stalk over, and it resembled the long-necked bird called a crane. The berries are still grown in New



England. Very few people know, however, that before the berries are put in bags to be sent to the rest of the country, each individual berry must bounce at least four inches high to make sure they are not too ripe! In 1988, a Thanksgiving ceremony of a different kind took place at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. More than four thousand people gathered on Thanksgiving night. Among them were Native Americans representing tribes from all over the country and descendants of people whose ancestors had migrated to the New World. The ceremony was a public acknowledgment of the Indians' role in the first Thanksgiving 350 years ago. Until recently most schoolchildren believed that the Pilgrims cooked the entire Thanksgiving feast, and offered it to the Indians. In fact, the feast was planned to thank the Indians for teaching them how to cook those foods. Without the Indians, the first settlers would not have survived. "We celebrate Thanksgiving along with the rest of America, maybe in different ways and for different reasons. Despite everything that's happened to us since we fed the Pilgrims, we still have our language, our culture, our distinct social system. Even in a nuclear age, we still have a tribal people." -Wilma Mankiller, principal chief of the Cherokee nation.\*\*\*



*Turkey wreath craft.*

# Thanksgiving Day, 2003

## A Proclamation by The President of The United States of America

Each year on Thanksgiving, we gather with family and friends to thank God for the many blessings He has given us, and we ask God to continue to guide and watch over our country.

Almost 400 years ago, after surviving their first winter at Plymouth, the Pilgrims celebrated a harvest feast to give thanks. George Washington proclaimed the first National Day of Thanksgiving in 1789, and Abraham Lincoln revived the tradition during the Civil War. Since that time, our citizens have paused to express thanks for the bounty of blessings we enjoy and to spend time with family and friends. In want or in plenty, in times of challenge or times of calm, we always have reasons to be thankful.

America is a land of abundance, prosperity, and hope. We must never take for granted the things that make our country great: a firm foundation of freedom, justice, and equality; a belief in democracy and the rule of law; and our fundamental rights to gather, speak, and worship freely. These liberties do not come without cost. Throughout history, many have sacrificed to preserve our freedoms and to defend peace around the world. Today, the brave men and women of our military continue this noble tradition. These heroes and their loved ones have the gratitude of our Nation.

On this day, we also remember those less fortunate among us. They are our neighbors and our fellow citizens, and we are committed to reaching out to them and to all of

those in need in our communities. This Thanksgiving, we again give thanks for all of our blessings and for the freedoms we enjoy every day. Our Founders thanked the Almighty and humbly sought His wisdom and blessing. May we always live by that same trust, and may God continue to watch over and bless the United States of America.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE W. BUSH, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim Thursday, November 27, 2003, as a National Day of Thanksgiving. I encourage Americans to gather in their homes, places of worship, and community centers to share the spirit of understanding and prayer and to reinforce ties of family and community.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-first day of November, in the year of our Lord two thousand three, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-eighth.

GEORGE W. BUSH

## US Embassy Donates to BudumBoram Refugee Camp

United States Ambassador Mary Carlin Yates awarded \$23,261.65, to the National Catholic Secretariat (NCS), the official arm of the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference and major partner to UNHCR. The ceremony took place December 3, 2003 at the Budumboram Refugee Camp.

The funds will support two projects that focus on Liberian refugee settlements in Ghana and address teenage pregnancy and neglected and abused unaccompanied minors. Funding for both projects was from the Department of State's Ambassador's Fund. The National Catholic Secretariat is the only organization in the world to be awarded two grants from this year's Ambassador's Fund.

The first project, entitled "Adolescent Mothers' Care and Prevention Project" addresses teenage pregnancy in the Liberian refugee settlement camp Budumboram and its social, economic and educational impact. This project strives to equip young girls with skills that will allow them to become better parents as well as productive earners. The girls will be enrolled in childcare and home economics courses, as well as health education, literacy and skills training workshops. Through community outreach and counseling, this project will also encourage



*Ambassador Mary Carlin Yates giving her speech at the Budumboram Camp.*

prevention of adolescent pregnancy by creating awareness in areas of sexual relations, contraceptives and abstinence, and self-defense mechanisms. This project is estimated to cost \$19,889.24.

The second project, entitled "Proposal for Funds for Unaccompanied Minors and Other Children at Risk" assists those most vulnerable to neglect or abuse, identified through clinic health care workers and social outreach, through the creation of a 'Child Welfare Fund.' This fund will be dedicated to the improvement of day care facilities, the establishment of shelter and

the provision of education. The day care facility would be renovated and brought up to NCS standards, children with no homes would be placed in rented rooms, modest allowances would be provided for

those who have no foster care and education would be offered for those whose caretakers are unable to provide tuition. The estimated budget for this project is \$3,372.41.

Both projects address real needs within the Liberian refugee community, offering concrete solutions in assisting needy and desperate children and adolescents, and in turn providing a more stable community and further unburdening the strain of resources within the host government's infrastructure.\*\*\*



# Christmas Day

December 25

Christmas is a joyful religious holiday when Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. The Christmas story comes from the Bible. An angel appeared to shepherds and told them that a Savior had been born to Mary and Joseph in a stable in Bethlehem. Three Wise Men from the East (the Magi) followed a wondrous star which led them to the baby Jesus to whom they paid homage and presented gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

To people all over the world, Christmas is a season of giving and receiving presents. In some European countries, Father Christmas, or Saint Nicholas, comes into houses in the night and leaves gifts for the children. Saint Nicholas is represented as a kindly man with a red cloak and long white beard. Another character, the Norse God Odin, rode on a magical flying horse across the sky in the winter to reward people with gifts. These different legends passed across the ages to make the present-day Santa Claus. Immigrant settlers brought Father Christmas to the United States. Father Christmas' name was gradually changed to Santa Claus, from the Dutch name for Father Christmas, which is Sinter Claas. Although he has origins in Norse and pre-Christian mythology, Santa Claus took shape in the United States. Americans gave Santa Claus a white beard, dressed him in a red suit and made him a cheery old gentleman with red cheeks and a twinkle in his eye. Most children believe that Santa Claus lives at the North Pole. All year he lists the names of children, both those who have been good and those who have been bad. He decides what presents to give to the good children. He oversees the manufacturing and wrapping of the presents by his helpers. Santa Claus supposedly gets his list of toys from the millions of children who write to him at the North Pole. Children also find Santa Claus at shopping malls across the country. They sit on his lap and tell him



what they want for Christmas. Of course, their parents are probably nearby listening in as well.

On December 24, Christmas Eve, Santa hitches his eight reindeer to a sleigh and loads it with presents. The reindeer pull him and his sleigh through the sky to deliver presents to children all around the world, that is, if they had been good all year. Santa Claus exists only in our imaginations. But he, Saint Nicholas, and Father Christmas are spirits of giving. Christmas has been associated with gift giving since the Wise Men brought gifts to welcome the newborn Jesus Christ. In anticipation of Santa's visit, American children listen to their parents read "The Night Before Christmas" before they go to bed on Christmas Eve. Clement Moore wrote the poem in 1823.

## Christmas Cards

Another important custom of Christmas is to send and receive Christmas cards, which are meant to help express the sentiment of the season. Some are religious in nature; others are more secular. Americans begin sending Christmas cards early in December to friends, acquaintances, and co-workers. The post office advises customers to mail early in the season and avoid the Christmas rush. Some people heed the advice; others wait until the last minute and then are upset when their loved ones have not received the greeting card or the present, which they

sent. It seems that nearly every family has its own unique Christmas observances. Many people are especially proud of Christmas traditions brought to the United States from their countries of origin. The wonderful diversity of foods, music and songs, prayers and stories all make Christmas the holiday of holidays in the United States. One custom in Texas and other parts of the American Southwest warmly welcomes Christmas visitors. People cut designs out of

the sides of paper bags. Then they put enough sand in the bottom of the bag to hold a candle. They line their walkways with the bags, and light the candles after dark. Guests can easily find their friend's walkway and follow the candles up to the door. In San Antonio, these "luminaries" are placed all along the River Walk, a paved walkway alongside the San Antonio River, and an old custom called "Las Posadas" is acted out. "Las Posadas" represents the journey that Mary and Joseph took from Nazareth to Jerusalem on a winter night 2000 years ago. Mary was about to give birth to Jesus on their way to be counted in the census. The inns were full and the only place they could find to rest was a barn. Jesus was born there and was placed in a manger, or wooden bin for feeding animals.

Two young people are chosen to play the roles of Mary and Joseph. They follow the luminaries up to a house and knock on the door. Joseph asks the owner if they can stay there for the night. The owner refuses to let them in, because the house is full. They knock at several more houses until finally someone lets them come in to stay the night. The house where the couple is invited was chosen before the celebration, and has a doll in a manger, representing Jesus. When the couple arrives at the house, they and the people who have followed sing Christmas carols and eat the food provided by the "innkeeper."



## Home for the Holidays

Going home for Christmas is a most cherished tradition of the holiday season. No matter where you may be the rest of the year, being at "home" with your family and friends for Christmas is "a must." The Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays are the busiest times of the year at airports, train stations and bus depots. It seems that all America is on the move and Americans are on their way to spend the holidays with their loved ones. This means that the house will be full of cousins, aunts and uncles that might not see each other during the year. Everyone joins in to help in the preparation of the festivities. Some family members go to choose a Christmas tree to buy and bring home. Others decorate the house or

wrap presents. And of course, each household needs to make lots of food! On Christmas Eve, there are evening church services. Attention is focused on the nativity scene, while all join in singing carols. On Christmas Day, there are other religious ceremonies at churches which families attend before they make their rounds to visit friends and relatives. The Christmas table looks much like a Thanksgiving feast of turkey or ham, potatoes and pie. No Christmas is complete without lots of desserts, and nothing symbolizes Christmas more than baked breads and cookies hot from the oven. Candy doesn't remain for long, either, during the holiday weeks. Hard candies such as peppermint candy canes and curly green and red ribbon candy are traditional

gifts and goodies. At Christmas Eve gatherings adults drink eggnog, a drink made of cream, milk, sugar, beaten eggs and brandy or rum. Plenty of eggnog or hot cocoa is on hand in colder climates for carolers, or people who go from house to house to sing Christmas carols to their neighbors. Long ago, each child hung a stocking, or sock, over the fireplace. Santa entered down the chimney and left candy and presents inside the socks for the children. Today the tradition is carried on, but the socks are now large red sock-shaped fabric bags still called stockings. Each child can't wait to open his or her eyes to see what Santa has left in the stocking. Giving gifts is a Christmas tradition.\*\*\*

## TOP US ARTS PERSONALITY VISITS GHANA

*A top U.S. arts personality Victoria Z. Rivers as in Ghana November 15 - 22, 2003, as part of the U.S. Department of State's Art in Embassies Program. She is a professor in Textile Arts at the Design Program Department of University of California, Davis. As part of her tour, she visited the Art Departments of the University of College of Education in Winneba and the Kwame*

*Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, to show slide lectures of some of her work in cloth design.*



**PHOTO:** (Left), California artist and professor of textile design at the University of California-Davis Victoria Rivers (far right) shows textile design students at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi, Ghana new ways of fusing gold leaf onto textiles to create a unique style of artwork. Ms. Rivers was in Ghana as part of the U.S. Department of State's American Artists Abroad Program.

*(Right), Ghanaians, including some of the country's leading artists, review one of three works of art by California artist and textile design professor, Victoria Rivers, which adorn the walls of the official residence of U.S. Ambassador Mary C. Yates. A recent reception for the visiting artist drew about 80 people, including artists, government officials, journalists and foreign diplomats. Ms. Rivers was in Ghana as part of the Department of State's American Artists Abroad program.*



## INTERNET SITES

### General Background Information

American Federation of Teachers (AFT) — AFL-CIO

<http://www.aft.org/>

Approximately one million teachers and other school-related personnel on all education levels belong to this organization. The Educational Issues Department works closely with "affiliates involved in K-12 education reform and restructuring" efforts and provides links to its programs on teacher quality, raising student achievement, school choice, academic standards and safety on this site.

The Brookings Institution — Research: Topics in U.S. Education

<http://www.brookings.org/es/research/ra3.htm>

This page lists articles and books that discuss various aspects of education policy in the United States. Also located at Brookings is the Brown Center on Education Policy [http://www.brookings.org/gs/brown/brown\\_hp.htm](http://www.brookings.org/gs/brown/brown_hp.htm) dedicated to researching the most recent issues in education reform.

Center for Civic Education

<http://www.civiced.org/>

The mission of the Center is "to promote informed, responsible participation in civic life by citizens committed to values and principles fundamental to American constitutional democracy." This page provides access to the materials developed in support of its curricular, teacher-training, and community-based programs.

Education Week on the Web

<http://www.edweek.org/>

Articles from Education Week and Teacher Magazine are accessible on this page, created for "people interested in education reform, schools, and the policies that guide them." Special reports, series, basic state-by-state information and daily news clips are some useful features of this important site. Of particular note are the Education Week: Issues Pages <http://www.edweek.org/context/topics/issues.cfm>. These useful pages contain background essays on key education issues, such as Assessment, Charter Schools, Choice, Community Service, Parent Involvement and Violence and Safety. Each page includes links to a glossary, relevant stories from the Education Week and Teacher Magazine archives and pertinent organizations.

Educational Resource Organizations Directory (EROD)

<http://www.ed.gov/Programs/EROD/>

Searchable by keyword or by state, this page provides links and contact information for state, regional and national educational organizations. EROD includes a fact sheet for each association listed, describing its focus, agenda, target audience and publications. Annotated links to public and private organizations are also listed on the Dept. of Education's page, Educational Associations and Organizations. <http://www.ed.gov/EdRes/EdAssoc.html>

ERIC — Educational Resources Information Center

<http://www.accesseric.org/>

The home page for ERIC's vast collection of education information, this site offers background for understanding and using the ERIC network. ERIC consists of virtual libraries, almost thirty clearinghouses, links to major education journals and organizations on line, and a database that answers questions from the public (AskERIC <http://ericir.syr.edu/>). The ERIC Digests [http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC\\_Digests/](http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/), "short reports that synthesize research and ideas about emerging issues in education," are another useful feature.

dea Central: Education

<http://www.epn.org/ideacentral/education/>

The "Virtual Magazine of the Electronic Policy Network" highlights recent reports and documents from a consortium of related organizations. In addition, a lengthy list of recommended links is available.

<http://www.epn.org/idea/idealcentral/>

National Center for Education Statistics

<http://nces.ed.gov/>

A major resource from the "primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data that are related to education in the United States and other nations." Publications of all kinds are available on this site, such as the comprehensive 1999 Digest of Education Statistics. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2000/digest99/>. Chapter 2 contains a variety of

statistics on public and private elementary and secondary education.

National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education

<http://www.highereducation.org/>

The center is a good source for research related to state and federal policies affecting education beyond high school. Several studies address the role of colleges and universities in improving public education.

National Education Association (NEA)

<http://www.nea.org/>

"NEA is America's oldest and largest organization committed to advancing the cause of public education." Its members number nearly 2.3 million and represent all levels of education from kindergarten to graduate school. Public policy debates on topics ranging from bilingual education to vouchers are addressed on NEA's issues pages, which include an overview and a list of related resources.

National Education Goals Panel: Building a Nation of Learners (NEGP)

<http://www.negp.gov/>

For the last ten years, the National Education Goals Panel has been reporting on national and state progress, identifying promising practices for improving education, and helping to build a nationwide, bipartisan consensus. Reports, newsletters and other resources pertaining to NEGP's mission are listed on this site.

Policy.com: Education Reform in America

[http://www.policy.com/issuewk/2000/0512\\_100/](http://www.policy.com/issuewk/2000/0512_100/)

This special report on current education reform proposals surveys many of the policy debates in American education. Comprehensive information on other education topics is available on the "Issues Library" section of this site.

State of American Education

<http://www.ed.gov/Speeches/soae/index.html>

Includes U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley's Seventh Annual State of American Education Address, "Setting New Expectations," February 22, 2000, and "A Five-Year Report Card on American Education."

Stateline.org: Education

<http://www.stateline.org/education/>

Stateline.org was founded to inform journalists, policy makers and engaged citizens about innovative public policies. Although the section on education pays particular interest to the funding of public schools, it also covers other major issues and provides education-related statistics for specific states, a glossary and other resource links.

U.S. Dept. of Education

<http://www.ed.gov/>

The main page from the Dept. of Education offers a wealth of information about the agency and its programs from funding opportunities to the latest news. Useful sections include: "Initiatives and Priorities" <http://www.ed.gov/ints.html>, "Publications and Products" <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/>, and "Legislation, Regulations, and Policy Guidance" <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/legsregs.html>.

Yahoo! Education: Index

<http://dir.yahoo.com/education/index.html> This index includes numerous categories reflecting current issues in education, with links to bibliographies, journals, Web sites, Web directories and recent speeches on education. The variety of topics and links included in the index provides a good overview of the state of U.S. education today.

### Standards

Developing Educational Standards: Overview

<http://putwest.boces.org/standards.html>

This page features information on the development of state- and nation-wide educational standards and links to the current journals and publications covering the standards movement.

The ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation

<http://ericae.net/> News, speeches and conferences on U.S. education standards can be found on this page. Among a list of assessment resources <http://ericae.net/nav-ar.htm> is the searchable pathfinder, "Assessment and Evaluation on the Internet"

<http://ericae.net/nintbod.htm>, which contains annotated links about educational assessment, evaluation and research.

## Diversity

Center for Applied Linguistics

<http://www.cal.org/>

"CAL carries out a wide range of activities including research, teacher education, analysis and dissemination of information, design and development of instructional materials, technical assistance, conference planning, program evaluation, and policy analysis."

Disability Awareness in the United States: A Rightful Place for All

<http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/able/>

Fact sheets, official transcripts, governmental and non-governmental links, legislation, court decisions and an extensive bibliography are available on this rich site from the Dept. of State's Office of International Information Programs.

ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education

<http://ericec.org/index.html>

Fact sheets, bibliographies, links to relevant legislation and access to online resources are located on this site, as well as links to a special education discussion group and other e-mail. ERIC EC is operated by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) <http://www.cec.sped.org/index.html>, an international advocacy group dedicated to improving educational outcomes for individuals with exceptionalities, students with disabilities, and the gifted.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997 (P.L. 105-17)

<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c105:H.R.5.ENR>

For background information on this act, see IDEA 1997.

<http://ed.gov/offices/OSERS/IDEA/>

U.S. Dept. of Education. Office of Bilingual and Minority Languages Affairs

<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OBEMLA/>

Resources to help school districts meet their responsibility to provide equal education opportunity to limited English proficient children are featured on this page.

## Choice

Center for Education Reform (CER)

<http://edreform.com/>

This Web site provides current information on the latest developments in education reform. CER conducts survey research on public attitudes towards reform issues, maintains a comprehensive database on reform efforts around the country, and tracks their progress. See also the report: Charter School Laws across the States 2000; Ranking Score Card and Legislative Profiles.

[http://www.edreform.com/charter\\_schools/laws/index.html](http://www.edreform.com/charter_schools/laws/index.html)

Frontline: The Battle over School Choice

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/vouchers/>

This site, based on a PBS Democracy Project/Election 2000 Special program, includes analyses of the condition of public schools; information and critiques on vouchers, charter schools and for-profit academies; and state-by-state resources on school reform initiatives. Video excerpts from the broadcast, interviews, links and a synopsis of the candidates' views can also be found here.

InfoUSA: Education

<http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/educ/educover.htm>

InfoUSA is an authoritative resource from the Office of International Programs, U.S. Dept. of State, for foreign audiences seeking information about official U.S. policies, American society and culture. The section on education includes survey articles, reports and links to major education resources.

U.S. Charter Schools

<http://www.uscharterschools.org/>

This national Web site supports the sharing of practical information and innovations among charter school operators. Major sections on this Web page include Starting and Running Your School, State and School Profiles, Resource Directory, Links and Searching Other Charter School Sites. For example, resources on charter schools from the Dept. of Education are here.

[http://www.uscharterschools.org/res\\_dir/res\\_5.htm](http://www.uscharterschools.org/res_dir/res_5.htm)

## Classroom

CHARACTER COUNTS! Coalition

<http://www.charactercounts.org/>

This youth-education initiative is a project of the Josephson Institute of Ethics. The coalition, a national, diverse partnership of schools, communities, education and human-service organizations, sponsors character development seminars, forums,

workshops, surveys and awards programs for young people.

Character Education Partnership (CEP)

<http://www.character.org/>

CEP is a "nonpartisan coalition of organizations and individuals dedicated to developing moral character and civic virtue in our nation's youth." CEP's online resources include a database, publications, articles and links to other organizations.

Democracy.org

<http://www.democracy.org/>

This educational non-profit organization is a member of the Washington State Partnership on Character Education. The site provides an extensive list of links on character education, citizenship, civic engagement, service learning, school renewal and reform in addition to bibliographies of related books.

National School Safety Center (NSSC)

<http://www.nssc1.org/>

School safety surveys and crime and violence statistics are among the useful features of this page from the National School Safety Center. Created by presidential directive in 1984, the center is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote safe schools and ensure quality education for all children.

Partnership for Family Involvement in Education (PFIE)

<http://pfie.ed.gov/>

The U.S. Dept. of Education administers the partnership and offers "resources, ideas, funding and conferences relevant to family involvement in education." This site can be approached from the perspectives of four sectors: Family-School, Employers for Learning, Community Organizations and Religious Groups; and provides information about each sector's activities for increasing family participation in children's learning.

PAVNET Online: Partnerships Against Violence Network

<http://www.pavnet.org/>

This is a "virtual library" of information about "violence and youth-at-risk, representing data from seven different Federal agencies." It is a one-stop, searchable, information resource to "help reduce redundancy in information management and provide clear and comprehensive access to information for States and local communities."

Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program

<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS/>

The Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program, sponsored by the U.S. Dept. of Education, is the Federal government's "primary vehicle for reducing drug, alcohol and tobacco use, and violence, through education and prevention activities in our nation's schools." See this site to learn more about model school programs, grants, research, news and related Web pages.

Safety and Violence in U.S. Schools

<http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/schools/>

Developed by the Society and Values team of the Dept. of State's Office of International Information Programs, this page contains links to White House conferences, speeches and fact sheets on school safety. A comprehensive site, it also includes links to news resources, articles, reports, statistics, laws and legislation.

## Teacher Training, Recruitment and Retention

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

<http://www.nbpts.org/nbpts/>

The mission of this nonprofit group is to establish "high and rigorous standards" for teachers, to develop and operate a national, voluntary system for assessment and certification and to advance related education reforms. This page provides detailed information about the latest standards, how to achieve certification and state-by-state program information.

National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education

<http://www.highereducation.org/>

The center is a good source for research related to state and federal policies affecting education beyond high school. Several studies address the role of colleges and universities in improving public education.

National Commission on Teaching and America's Future

<http://www.tc.columbia.edu/~teachcomm/home.htm>

This page, based at Teachers College, Columbia University, represents a bipartisan group of leaders, who view teacher quality as the most essential element in school reform. A report compiled in 1996, What Matters Most: Teaching For America's Future <http://www.tc.columbia.edu/~teachcomm/What.htm> presented detailed goals for the year 2006. A follow-up report written a year later, Doing What Matters Most: Investing in Quality Teaching, <http://www.tc.columbia.edu/~teachcomm/dwhat.htm> measures the progress the commission has made toward enforcing the changes suggested in the original report.



